1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
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in dances. In front of most houses rises a short totem-pole,[1] either pierced for the doorway, or standing on the opposite side of the sidewalk.

The Family

It is probably no exaggeration to say that in every part of the world the most important social unit is the family. It certainly is among the Bella Coola, yet its lack of definite social obligations makes it difficult to define. Reduced to minimum size, the family consists of a man, his wife, or wives, and his children. Such a unit occupies one of the bedrooms of a large house, and it is to such a family that an infant automatically belongs at birth. Disregarding for the moment ceremonial obligations, which are shared by others, it is the father and mother who are responsible largely for the upbringing of the child. Such education as he receives comes from them, with the assistance of members of the ancestral family. This is chiefly imitative; a boy, as he increases in strength, follows his father on hunting expeditions or fishing. The mother teaches her daughters how to make baskets, and they follow her when she gathers berries, or when she cooks and performs household duties. The Bella Coola are fond of children, in many cases to the extent of over-indulging them, and they grow up amid the open life of the large houses, absorbing information of all kinds without being aware of so doing.

Only two kinds of functional training need be mentioned. A wise father carefully trains his sons to remember their debts (I, p. 369), and the method of teaching ancient myths has already been described; otherwise there is little direct instruction. On the other hand, parents devote great care to furnishing their children with every possible means of strengthening their supernatural elements on which success depends. These can

[1] Since the Bella Coola believe that totem-poles were used by their ancestors in early times, they are included in this description of a village, without reference to their development in post-European times. This account is compiled from descriptions given by elderly informants; it is inevitable, therefore, that changes due to European contact may be included.

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594 869 be made more powerful by magical means or the ritual acts of relatives. Although these often entail great labour and expense, parents seldom neglect their duty; in fact, care for their children is one of the strongest Bella Coola characteristics, though the methods used are so foreign to the white man that he has difficulty in realizing their meaning. The hope of both parents is to have children to carry on their names; infanticide is unknown and the death of an infant is mourned almost as much as that of an adult. Sterility and impotency are frequent causes for divorce. [847] [586]

163 [165] At the present time there is a high birth-rate in Bella Coola, although the heavy infant mortality prevents any appreciable increase in the population. In the old days, it is said, there were always large families, though much confidence cannot be placed in this statement. In families where there are several children, the first-born, whether boy or girl, assumes an important position. His or her influence, as eldest, is naturally considerable, and the parents foster this through the vague feeling that it is proper for the eldest to be the most important in the family. In adult years, and after marriage, the influence of the eldest of a family continues to have considerable weight with younger brothers and sisters. 593

592 556 [595] [602] If a man is poor he cannot hope to have more than one wife, and his family circle will be limited to their children, and perhaps to elderly parents. On the other hand, a wealthy and powerful man usually has a larger family. Not only may he have several wives, but his aged relatives, and those of his wife, look to him for support and assistance. Such are usually welcome to live in his house; they lend what aid they can in collecting food, and it gratifies a man's pride and sense of power to be closely surrounded by a large family. The Bella Coola are, on the whole, considerate to their aged relatives.[1] [888]

[178] [1] This is not true of the present. During the winter of 1923-4 a feeble old man, living alone, was often in actual want of food. Disliked and despised, of a mean disposition himself, none of his surviving relatives, of whom the nearest were nephews, would take him into their houses. Commenting on this man's fate, several informants pointed out how, in the old days, such a one could have found